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Appeal Bares Action of State Dept.

BY WILLARD EDWARDS

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

Washington, April 13 —

state department was called upon today to answer charges that it transferred six veteran security officers in an attempt to cover up a plot against Otto F. Otepka.

Otepka, former chief of evaluations in the state department's bureau of security, was dismissed last fall on charges of conduct unbecoming a state department officer after he cooperated with a Senate inquiry into lax security in his division.

Otepka appealed this dismissal and demanded a hearing, but the state department has never granted him one. He has remained on the payroll but has been kept in isolation.

Colleagues Back Him

Six of his colleagues in the bureau, under questioning by government investigators, said that they believed that Otepka is innocent. They said they would testify in Otepka's behalf when the hearing was held. They also joined with Otepka in criticism of loose security practices in the state department.

On March 15, the six were told of their transfer to other posts, all in positions of less importance, and removed from duties in which they were skilled.

Harry M. Hite, Edwin A. Burkhardt, and John R. Norpel Jr., filed formal appeals to the Civil Service commission for themselves and the others: Raymond Laughton, Billy N. Hughes, and Frank V. Gardner.

These appeals were placed in the Congressional Record by Rep. H. R. Gross [R., Ia.] and Rep. James E. Bromwell [R., Ia.].

Accuse State Department

Both accused the state department of taking action against the six because they claimed to have knowledge of "a plot to frame Otepka and have him fired."

Like Otepka, the three protesting employees have the highest federal ratings. Hite is a lawyer with government service of more than 10 years. Norpel is a former Federal Bureau of Investigation agent with 17 years of experience in the government. Burkhardt is an experienced civil servant.

All charge that their new assignments, which they say were ordered in reprisal for their defense of Otepka, constitute a reduction in rank. Their new assignment to the bureau of

inter-American affairs was designed, they said, to intimidate six friendly witnesses for Otepka.

The attempt has failed, they said, asserting that they intend to testify that the charges against Otepka are spurious and fabricated solely to harm him because he responded truthfully when asked by Senate investigators about shortcomings and deficiencies in the state department's personnel security program.

Recall Reilly's Action

The Civil Service commission was asked to take note of the fact that John F. Reilly, former deputy assistant secretary of state, placed Otepka under surveillance, tapped his telephone, and then denied these actions under oath when questioned by the Senate internal security subcommittee. Reilly later admitted this perjury and was asked to resign.

Another state department officer, David I. Belisle, a special assistant to Reilly, also was asked to resign, but has been permitted to remain. He also denied knowledge of wiretapping but later admitted it.

"I have been informed that my reassignment was due to the fact that 'I carried the torch' too far and too long for Mr. Otepka," Norpel told the Civil Service commission. The action against me is based on reprisal for my close association with and outspoken defense of Otepka.

Guilt by Association

"The 'guilt by association' concept which the state department professes to openly oppose is the only basis for my degradation . . . Mr. Belisle continues in a position whereby he greatly affects the operations of the office of security. It is my belief that it was thru his persuasion that my reassignment occurred."

"The disclosed testimony of Mr. Belisle and Mr. Reilly to date has shocked the public and rendered a disservice to the entire security-intelligence community whose integrity suffered by the calculated actions of these two men."

Bromwell told the House that only one word — persecution — could define the state department's use of executive power in the Otepka case.

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